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Is style teachable?: a reconsideration of the stylistic value of prose memorization

Terry Ann Rasmussen
Iowa State University

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by

Terry Ann Rasmussen

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to argue for a reconsideration of the potential value of imitation, particularly prose-memorization, as a pedagogical approach towards style.

Because this investigation began as an attempt to answer the question "Is style teachable?", Chapter One presents a literature review of the various historical, theoretical, and pedagogical approaches towards style. Relying heavily on an article by Louis Milic, the closing discussion in Chapter One attempts to identify the cause of the confusion that seems to accompany discussions of style: the dual nature of stylistic choice. Distinguishing between a writer's deliberate and automatic choices not only creates a better understanding of why so many approaches to style have been entertained but also provides a strong argument for the value of classical imitative approaches to the teaching of style.

In Chapter Two, the stylistic value of one such approach, prose memorization, is re-evaluated by applying findings from contemporary research in

psychology. These findings, drawn from research into memory for prose, memory for surface structure, and memory without awareness, seem to provide adequate justification for seriously reconsidering this classical approach towards style. In the conclusion of Chapter Two, a framework for a future empirical investigation is outlined.

While Chapter Two is an extension of an argument put forth in the conclusion of Chapter One, each chapter attempts to stand alone. For this reason, as well as for emphasis, references to some secondary sources presented in Chapter One are intentionally repeated in the introduction of Chapter Two.

CHAPTER ONE: IS STYLE TEACHABLE?

Introduction

When evaluating student essays, one of the marginal cliches' composition teachers resort to is "nice flow," a cliche' suggesting that one of the many appropriate metaphors for language is a liquid containing natural currents that glide readers across and down a page. Less often do teachers write "nice style," perhaps because the metaphor seems so much clearer. Apparently, teachers can distinguish between pleasing and/or appropriate styles and not so pleasing and/or inappropriate styles. We seem to understand that writing which "flows" places minimal demands upon a reader, while presenting the writer's meaning in some rhetorically satisfying fashion. Rarely do teachers write "nice flow" on essays that lack substance or fail to achieve overall coherence. It seems that we attach a great deal more to this concept of style then we realize.

How should we define style? In The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (1941) W.K. Wimsatt argues that it is futile to even try:

> The only reason a term should mean something is the history of its application, the fact that it has meant something. . . . [T]he meaning of a term in a given instance is what any man decides to make it. . . . (3)

He goes on to state that "Meaning is the psychic entity, the something in the mind -- for which material is not adequate" and notes that a bad style represents not a deviation of words from meaning but a deviation of a reader's received meaning from an author's intended meaning (9). Wittgenstein's (1958) approach towards style would probably be similar to Wimsatt's, for he also argues that the meaning of an individual word is in its use or, as Alfred Bloom explains, "the effect it is designed to achieve" (8).

But if style is to be a meaningful concept in the composition classroom, if it is something important for us to teach, we need a clear and limited definition. In other words, we need a practical definition, one that allows us to meaningfully and effectively teach specific features pertaining to writing. Confusion over definition and doubt surrounding the appropriate approach towards teaching style are responsible for the question which prompted this investigation: Is

style teachable?

In what follows, I present a background literature review of various historical, theoretical and pedagogical approaches towards style. The concluding discussion relies on an important distinction made by Louis Milic regarding the dual nature of style. This distinction appears to be the source of many of the former problems associated with defining, teaching, and placing style within a theoretical construct. In addition, Milic's distinction presents what I believe to be a compelling argument in favor of the potential value of teaching style through classical exercises in imitation. In particular, it suggests that the classical imitative practice of prose memorization may be as valuable a practice today as it was over two thousand years ago.

History

Since the beginning of rhetoric, style has been defined, categorized and classified, in regard to: 1) its effect upon a reader (Longinus), 2) its causes (writer ethos, skill or genius), and 3) the inherent linguistic, rhetorical, creative and even moral

qualities of the language employed. There is no simple or conclusive definition of style.

In the introduction to Representative Essays on the Theory of Style (1905) William Brewster classifies five approaches towards style. The first approach views style as an "exact" or "precise expression of an idea, or . . . a kind of thought" which relies heavily on "harmony between matter and expression" (xiii). The second view incorporates audience considerations into the first view, adapting itself to the readers only through "effective expression" (xiv). The third view, style as personality, focuses on the writer. In its broadest sense, this view encompasses the personality, or style, of a particular culture or time period. Style as superficial adornment, achieved through patterns, rhythm and harmony, defines the fourth approach. While the fifth approach, style as "literary excellence," is concerned with "proper words in proper places" (xv).

Twenty years after Brewster, Paul M. Fulcher (in "The Seven Lamps of Style") identifies seven qualities that constitute style (Foundations of English Style, 1927). The first three -- sincerity, truth, and courage

-- are inward qualities of the writer. Sincerity, Fulcher contends, is the ability to formulate, hold and dismiss ideas. Truth involves presenting our own individual vision, while courage entails the ability to stand in the minority and the willingness to express error. The fourth quality, clarity, is defined as the accuracy of word and the proper relationship between sentences and paragraphs. Beauty, quality six, is described as that which is only "as deep as the thought itself" (13), the "consciousness that we have been in the company of a mind worth knowing, and the urge to follow along in the path on which we have been started" (8-9). Quality seven, variety, which is perhaps synonymous with originality, is described as that which exists "inherent in the thought" and within the "author's vision" (9).

Included within Fulcher's anthology are the following statements concerning style. In his essay, "On Style," Buffon states that "if one writes as he thinks, is himself convinced of what he wishes to impart to others, this self-respect, which makes for respect towards others and truth of style, will enable him to

produce the whole effect he intends. . ." (49). Remy De Gourmont writes that "the worth of the style is exactly equal to the worth of the thought, that is the central truth. . ." (45-6). And G.H. Lewes stresses: "No style can be good that is not sincere. It must be the expression of its author's mind" (64). Lewes goes on to state that a writer "must be represented under the strain of great emotion" or "mental agitation" (75), which is only possible when the material stimulates thought: "If there is beauty in your thought, your style will be beautiful; if there is any real emotion to express, the expression will be moving" (89).

Clearly, over the years a variety of views towards style have been entertained. For all practical purposes, the pedagogical demands of these approaches are not only overwhelming -- but unrealistic. Therefore, it's not surprising that Erika Lindemann (in A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers, 1987) begins her discussion of style by addressing the ambiguous nature of the term. She agrees that style has been and is viewed in a variety of ways, including the broader definitions of style as the expressive characteristics

of an individual, a group or a historical period. Lindemann aptly points out that such broad definitions of style "touch too many bases to be useful" which is why today many prefer to consider style as it relates to a writer's "choices" (124).

Among the five classical canons of rhetoric -- invention, arrangement, **style**, **memory** and delivery -- style is perhaps the most problematic to define. Defining style as "choices" also appears to be too broad, because it depicts style as something confusingly synonymous with rhetoric. Therefore, it may be preferable to limit style to the syntactic and lexical choices that a writer makes in shaping and presenting meaning.

Theory

Given the variety of approaches to style that have been proposed, it's not surprising that a conclusive theory of style has remained elusive. Presumably, definitions evolve from theories, since definitions assume certain truths.

In "Theories of Style and Their Implications for the Teaching of Composition" (1967), Louis Milic argues

that the term style comes up "far too often" in the teaching of composition, without any consistent theoretical foundation (256). He then distinguishes between three theories of style that have been and are currently employed: Rhetorical Dualism, Psychological Monism, and Croce's Organic View.

In the tradition of classical rhetoric, Ornate Form or Rhetorical Dualism implies that "ideas exist wordlessly and can be dressed in a variety of outfits, depending on the need for the occasion" (256). If this theory is accepted, one must believe in a separate existence of content and form, permitting "a belief in a real intended meaning behind every utterance" (258). Only this theory, argues Milic, makes it possible to ask students to clarify their thoughts to make them "logical" before "actually embodying [them] in words" (258). In this respect, awkwardness and error are seen as correctable by clarifying intended meaning.

Individualist or Psychological Monism takes up Buffon's aphorism, "style is the man." Milic argues that this theory suggests that a writer cannot help writing the way he does, for the way one writes "is the

dynamic expression of his personality. . ." (257). Milic is uncomfortable with any Platonic view of Individualist theory that argues that the only way to improve writing is "through an enhancement of the student's soul"; such a view creates a prerequisite for good writing -- the writer must first be a good person (258). The more modern version of Individualist theory views style merely as an expression of the student's personality which, Milic explains, leaves the teacher useless, except to encourage the writer and provide assistance in invention. Milic drops his discussion of Individualist theory with the question: "What if a student's personality fully expressed leads to contortion, gibberish or paranoia?" (257).

Noted by Milic as the most modern theory, Croce's Organic view "denies the possibility of any separation between content and form" (257). In other words, there is really only one way to address and present any given subject. According to Milic, "Any discussion of style in Croce's view is useless and irrelevant" for "no seam" exists "between meaning and style"; thus, there exists

"no style at all, only meaning or intuition" (259). Such a Positivistic approach, argues Milic, leaves the teacher even more helpless than if he/she possessed an Individualist orientation; since subject and form are one, the subject dominates over student expression (259).

Given the theoretical options, Milic believes "composition theory has been going in circles for the last two or three decades" and, accordingly, the "level of composition among freshman has been declining" (259). He cautions that form cannot be taught by nonbelievers and creative expression cannot be interpreted as a compromise between form and substance.

According to Milic, we need to return to a "rhetoric" which is "honestly and unashamedly concerned with form and not with content" (260). He believes teaching "dualistic theory" is essential in the early stages of writing, until the "maturing" of the "literary personality" has had an opportunity to "influence a student's style" (260). The Monistic or Individualist view of style, Milic contends, cannot be allowed to "infect" the teaching of style for it "vitiates all the

available pedagogical resources of rhetoric" (260). We can encourage some degree of individuality, but to encourage an Organic view would prohibit revisions, since any changes in presentation would represent changes in meaning. Only the Dualistic view, stresses Milic, offers the teacher the opportunity to create an awareness of the various ways of saying things.

In "Aristotle's Concept of Ethos, or if not His Somebody Else's" (1982), Michael Halloran raises objections to Milic's theoretical distinctions and definitions, beginning with the argument that Milic's portrayal of Rhetorical Dualism/Ornate Form (which favors form over content) is historically inaccurate. Separating style and rhetoric from substance, contends Halloran, is "anti-classical" as well as "anti-Aristotelian" (59).

Given Milic's views, in which the Organic theory is rejected for denying any such thing as style and in which Psychological Monism is rejected because it presents more of "a theory of personality" than of style, Halloran asserts that Milic has managed to define subject matter "as style and nothing else but style" and

has implied that teachers should address style, and nothing else, in the composition classroom (59).

To illuminate the weaknesses in Milic's purported "classical" Dualistic theory of style, Halloran suggests that we begin an investigation of style by adopting "a theory of ethos," which is truly representative of classical rhetoric. Borrowing from Aristotle, Halloran explains that ethos, one of the three classical modes of appeal (ethos, logos and pathos), emphasizes "the conventional rather than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private" (60). In other words, only that expression which is representative of and valued by a culture is valued in an individual.

Ethos develops through "habituation," explains Halloran, in which "habits, and hence character, are formed by performing virtuous actions" (61). Citing Milic's discussion of Psychological Monism, Halloran stresses that while we cannot choose our "personalities," we can choose our "characters."

According to Halloran, "if we adopt the view that a theory of ethos is an important need for teachers of composition, we take on responsibility for shaping the

character of our students" and any education in rhetoric "becomes a moral education" (61):

> this is what we are doing whether we like it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not. In directing students to write this way rather than that, we tell them in effect to be this sort of character than that. If we attend only to technical matters of correctness and style in the narrow sense, we in effect form our students as technicians. (61)

Focusing only on "technical matters of stylistic choice is inadequate," explains Halloran, because these choices "define the character of the speaker and of the world" (63). In Halloran's view, any pedagogically meaningful and historically accurate classical theory of style must incorporate a theory of ethos.

Presenting any theory as autonomous often proves difficult. In adopting any theory of style, one would hope for a compatible theory of composition. Unfortunately, as James Berlin illustrates in the 1982 article "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," this can be difficult. Berlin identifies four pedagogical camps: New Rhetoricians, Expressionists, Classical Rhetoricians/Neo-Aristotelians and Traditionalists/Positivists. In a later work, Rhetoric and Reality (1987), Berlin provides new

titles for several of these theories of composition, while still exemplifying the degree to which these theories overlap, as well as borrow from and evolve out of the strengths and weaknesses of one another. His conclusion is that all of these theories appear to be moving towards Social Constructionism or New Rhetoric.

Placing Milic's theories of style, however flawed, within Berlin's theories of rhetoric is tricky. Akin to Milic's Rhetorical Dualism, New Rhetoric stresses process over product, with an eye and ear to audience. Language is seen as something to be strategically manipulated and clearly interpreted. While the Traditionalists would seem to also fall into Milic's camp of Rhetorical Dualists since a Traditionalist focuses on developing skill in style and arrangement, the Positivist orientations of Traditionalist theory resemble Milic's Organic stance. Unlike New Rhetoric and Rhetorical Dualism, Traditionalist theory does not attend to invention.

Berlin's Classical Rhetoric resembles Croce's Organic Theory in that it stresses that all truth is rational and derived from logic. Arrangement relies

heavily on this logical/rational development which may suggest, although Berlin does not go this far and Halloran would raise objections, that Classical Rhetorical theory, like Croce's Organic Theory, perceives content and form as one.

Finally, Berlin's Expressionist (or Neo-Platonic) theory correlates exceptionally well with Milic's Psychological Monism, since both emphasize the writer at the apex of the rhetorical triangle.

The question of the relationship between truth and language controls Berlin's discussion. Boldly standing alone, New Rhetoric takes on a Transactional or Social Constructionist orientation that views truth as something nonexistent until it is "created" through discourse, while Berlin's other three theories perceive truth as existing prior to language. In taking the stand that truth is created, New Rhetoric strives to illuminate the cognitive and social complexities of our language, and the mutual roles of reader and writer in shaping meaning.

Further difficulties encountered in defining and adopting a single theoretical stance towards style are

addressed by Thomas Gage, in "Philosophies of Style and Their Implications for Composition" (1981). Gage explains how style presents problems on linguistic, rhetorical, and philosophical levels. If we define an approach to style on one of these levels, we may soon find that definition incompatible with our approach on another level. Everything we do in teaching writing implies an epistemological orientation, yet such orientations may easily differ depending upon the task that we're involved in. For example, if we define a rhetorical view of style as choice, we may run into a conflicting epistemology, one in which form and content cannot be separated. Following a discussion of Milic's Monistic and Dualistic theories, Gage illustrates how we currently apply both in our teachings. When we stress revision, we advocate a Dualistic view which allows a separation between the way something is said and the idea itself. But when we stress the plain style, we assert that there is an ideal way to say something, indicating a Monistic orientation.

All efforts to teach style, Gage concludes, have a lot to do with our views towards the relationship

between "thinking and knowing" (620). And choosing between Dualism and Monism is not as important as "being clear about what assumptions we appeal to when we employ either strategy" (619).

In "Style in Composition Research and Teaching" (1989), Ron Fortune suggests that we don't contemplate our theoretical assumptions because we don't teach style as much as we used to, primarily because of our current emphasis on process. After citing Maxine Hairston's discussion of the Kuhnian "paradigm shift" from product to process, Fortune explains how this shift towards process has resulted in invention taking center stage at the expense of attention to style. While quick to point out that "it is a concern for the quality of the final product that drives an interest in the processes through which a writer creates a product," he is concerned that this shift may have overlooked the value of style in composition studies (508). Given time, he believes that the decline in attention to style, which is now forced to "compete" for the attention of researchers and teachers, will correct itself (509).

The real problem, Fortune stresses, lies in

developing a theoretical framework compatible with attention to both style and process:

> style is at the heart of what we do in composition; it is just a matter of developing a new understanding of it in relation to other aspects of composing and the process principles that govern our thinking about texts and writing. (527)

Pedagogy

If we define style as the linguistic choices involved in shaping and presenting meaning, style may very well be "at the heart of what we do in composition." How do we teach these choices? We stress the differences that choices create within a rhetorical context -- how syntax and diction affect purpose, audience, material, and the writer's voice. And we ask our students to experiment with these choices as they write, to test the powers of and their powers over language. As Erika Lindemann notes in A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers (1987), we emphasize the plain style during revision because today's readers prefer plain prose. Associated with clarity and with "readability," plain prose strives to wipe clean the window between reader and writer. In addition, journal

articles on teaching style discuss approaches ranging from stylistic or rhetorical analysis to sentence-combining. And then there are those articles, published sporadically every few years, that call for a return to the classical practices of imitation.

As for stylistic analysis, Edward P.J. Corbett presents a comprehensive explanation of the procedure, followed by a sample application, in "A Method of Analyzing Prose Style with a Demonstration Analysis of Swift's 'A Modest Proposal'" (1981). The method begins with sentence length study, a fairly tedious procedure of discovering the average sentence length and type (simple, compound, loose, periodic, etc.) within a writer's work (336). Next, students identify the lexical tendencies of a writer to determine the "weight" and "effect" of a writer's style (336). Following an analysis of sentence and word level tendencies, paragraphs are examined to supply the reader with "a sense of the density, pace, and readability of an author's style" (338). The final, and most difficult stage is "relating all this [preceding data] to the author's rhetorical strategies" and recognizing that an

author "must be in command of not one style, but of many" when engaged in various rhetorical situations (339). And after students have analyzed several styles of one author using this procedure, Corbett recommends that they undertake an analysis of their own writing styles.

Ian Pringle begins the article "Why Teach Style? A Review Essay" (1983) with a discussion of Joseph M. Williams' book Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace. According to Pringle, the "stance" of Williams' book is that the "plain" style is what students should strive for. Pringle contends that through "prescriptive instruction" in editing, Williams' book teaches students how to change "characteristics of the 'terminally opaque' style into the plain, 'efficient' style" (Pringle 92). Pringle perceives two challenges presented by Williams' text: "Is it really possible to teach style at all? And if it is, is the plain 'efficient' style the right goal for our students to aim at?" (92).

In light of these questions, Pringle begins with a discussion of Stephen D. Krashen's distinction between

"learning" a second language and "acquiring" one. Krashen believes, Pringle explains, that without interest and semantic comprehension, instruction in grammar proves futile as a means of improving usage (92-3). Pringle does not believe that a student can produce "natively fluent output on the basis of learned grammar rules" such as Williams' book proposes (94):

> although you may teach students genuinely useful editing techniques . . . it will never help them to do anything beyond simple fiddling, making minor surface adjustments. If students are to produce literate writing, they will do so primarily on the basis of what they have acquired, and what they acquire will come to them . . . from "comprehensible input," from reading good, relevant models, not because they are prescribed, but because they are interesting, intellectually engaging, exciting, new. (93)

In Pringle's opinion, activities such as sentence-combining give students "copious practice in a small number of syntactic strategies in the expectation that the practice will make the students internalize them, and subsequently use them spontaneously in their own writing" (94). Such "explicit" strategies, he argues, are a type of grammar teaching which "has no measurable effect on the quality of student writing" (94-5).

In addition, Pringle questions whether

"encouraging" the plain style may hinder the development of cognitive abilities: "Are we intervening in complex and little understood rhetorical transactions in a way that will work to the disadvantage of the student?" (95). It's an important question and Pringle admits he has no answer. He does, however, believe the question should be in the minds of all composition teachers for it is quite possible that "we do not understand clearly enough what we do, nor why" (98).

Pringle is not the first to question our emphasis on the plain style. Nor is he alone in questioning the usefulness of sentence-combining activities.

In regard to the plain style, Richard Weaver made his position clear in 1953. In The Ethics of Rhetoric, Weaver states that the emphasis on the plain style is the result of a culture which has incorporated new "God terms," such as "progress," "efficiency," and "science," into its language (212-218). The plain style, asserts Weaver, "with its suppression of beats and its consequent effect of hurrying over things" does not display "the respect for the powers and limitations of

the audience" that the "old" or "polite" style did (184):

> It does not give the listener the roughage of verbiage to chew on while meditating the progress of the thought. . . . "[S]paciousness" has a quite rational function in enforcing a measure, so that the mind and the sentiments too can keep up with the orator [or writer] in his thoughts. (185)

This call for "spaciousness," a concept closely resembling amplification, is also made by Richard Ohmann in the 1979 article "Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language." Ohmann argues that our pre-occupation with too exact a representation of meaning through the use of concrete words may take something away from the reader's ability to "understand . . . transform . . . and relate" the language "to everything else" (396). Ohmann's belief is that language is made richer, and more colorful, through the use of abstract nouns or those words "that are most heavily laden with ideology" (397).

As for the writer, the loss may be even greater. In forcing students to compress and concretize, we may be discouraging "critical inquiry" (397). Like Pringle, Ohmann is "concerned that in the cause of improving" writers' skills "we may end up increasing

What Weaver, Ohmann, and Pringle all appear to be suggesting is that the emphasis on the plain style limits the writer's development of complex ideas and deprives the reader of the opportunity to witness, or fully appreciate, the writer's struggling development of those ideas.

Like the plain style, sentence-combining has received its share of criticism. In "Linguistics and Writing" (1985) William Strong presents a comprehensive overview of research both supporting and rejecting the effectiveness of sentence-combining. While himself an advocate of sentence-combining activities, Strong argues that for these activities to be effective they must be accompanied by "cohesion analysis," attention to the lexical and syntactical threads that weave sentences and paragraphs together. Strong stresses that "good sentences . . . do not in themselves ensure quality writing," because "meaning inheres not only in but also between sentences" (78).

Grammatical, lexical and conjunctive "cohesion" or "pointing" between "textual units," asserts Strong, is what distinguishes good writing from bad (81). He

identifies the significance of semantic alternatives, by noting how experienced writers employ "over eleven synonyms per 100 t-units, whereas the least competent writers used none" (81). These semantic ties clarify meaning by facilitating smoother transitions and overall cohesion.

But without a writer's "commitment" to subject, Strong concludes, "attention to cohesion" is futile (83): "In the final analysis . . . it is meaning that matters. . ." (85). This point seems to be at the core of objections to another pedagogical approach towards style -- imitation. By asking writers to imitate other writers, we stress structure over content. Instead of asking writers to commit to subjects and create meaning, we are asking them to attend to mechanical processes. But advocates of imitation will quickly respond that the choices involved in the making of meaning are expanded through imitating experienced writers.

Imitation advocates all seem to agree on two points, the first of which is used by many sentence-combining advocates:

1. that which is applied generously and deliberately will eventually become automatic;
2. through imitating others, writers develop their own unique styles.

In "The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Classical Rhetoric" (1971) Edward P.J. Corbett addresses the first point by asserting that the classical orator did not imitate another to be like that person but rather to be different. The "internalization of structure" involved in imitation, he explains, is what "sets us free" as writers (250). In discussing the value of imitation in the history of rhetoric, Corbett notes that the "ancient rhetoricians taught that oratorical skills are acquired by three means -- theory, imitation, and practice" (243). And it was this "simple triadic formula" that "provided a structure and a direction for the teaching of the language arts . . . for over two thousand years" (243-234).

Renaissance schools supply us with examples of the three "most common" imitative exercises -- "memorization, translation and paraphrasing" (246). Of these three, only paraphrase is still actively employed in the composition classroom. Translation is no longer

an option, since the majority of our students are "functionally monolingual" (248). And memorization, along with delivery, died out in the fifteenth century with the advent of the printing press, which allowed for the distribution of printed speeches to students of rhetoric (246).

Corbett's discussion of memorization is extremely interesting. He cites Quintilian on its value:

> [The boys] will form an intimate acquaintance with the best writings, will carry their models with them and unconsciously reproduce the style of the speech which has been impressed upon their memory. They will have a plentiful and choice vocabulary and a command of artistic structure and a supply of figures which will not have to be hunted for, but will offer themselves spontaneously from the treasure-house . . . in which they are stored. (qtd. in Corbett 246, from Institutio Oratoria, II, vii, 3-4)

Noting "unconsciously" and "spontaneously" as key words in Quintilian's passage, Corbett states (247):

> anyone who has had the experience while writing of having a phrase or a structure come back to him unbidden from the deep well of the subconscious might be willing to concede that the restoration of the practice of memorizing might be a good thing.

Another supporter of imitation is W. Ross Winterowd. In "Style: A Matter of Manner" (1970), Winterowd

explains how "manner forces matter" -- how we construct language shapes meaning (161). Because he believes that the sentence is where the "real generative capacity of language lies," he argues that the ideal way to teach style is to have students imitate a given syntactic construction with their own material (167). By imitating syntactic constructions, via sentence-combining tasks, writers "internalize" structures which not only facilitate later originality but assist in creating an acute awareness of the effect form has on meaning.

The "emotional and intellectual" effects that form has on meaning are well illustrated by Winston Weathers in a brief but useful article entitled "The Rhetoric of the Series" (1966). The two-part series creates an "abrupt" or "final" effect: She won't return because she's finished the work and she's started a new job. The three-part series appeals to reason or logic: If she leaves tomorrow, there will be no Thanksgiving, no reunion, and no celebration. Finally, the four-part series is more emotional, sometimes a plea: She left the house without her car keys, her purse, her hat, and

her coat.

Frank D'Angelo notes in "Imitation and Style" (1973) that through imitating others we not only speed up the developmental process of acquiring writing skills but also maintain "those aspects of style that are worth preserving" (283). His approach is similar to Corbett's statistical textual analysis, but he has students imitate the structure of a textual model with their own material, in the belief that close imitation will allow students to internalize alternative syntactic structures.

Another practical discussion on imitation in the classroom is presented by D.H. Kehl in "Composition in the Mimetic Mode: Imitatio and Exercitatio" (1986). Borrowing from Ben Johnson's three part pedagogical formula, Kehl notes how imitatio is currently the "missing connection" (285) between lectio (reading) and exercitatio (practice).

After presenting testimonials from noted writers as to the benefits of imitating other writers, Kehl stresses that successful imitation requires a generous amount of exercise, moving from general to more specific

tasks. He offers a variety of approaches and examples, beginning with the imitation of the tone, voice, and point of view of an entire essay, followed by an imitation of the "structural patterns or mode of discourse" (289). He also suggests presenting several paragraphs written on the same theme to students and then having them try their hands at addressing the subject.

Like Corbett and Winterowd, Kehl believes that imitation at the sentence level may ultimately prove the most beneficial. In addition to imitating specific sentence types and patterns, he suggests asking students to imitate "the succinctness, the rhythm, [and] the sensory imagery" of a short poem by substituting words, phrases and imagery (323).

Kehl's suggestions are interesting because they illustrate how imitation can address meaning in addition to form. There's also an element of playfulness towards language within several of his exercises that students may find appealing and which we, as teachers, probably need to foster within our students.

Discussion

As composition teachers, it is easy to question sharp lines Milic has drawn between theories of style. While many of us may not agree that "style is the man," we might still view style as representing a writer's "attempts" to convey thoughts, or truths, as he/she sees them, which often fail not because a writer lacks personality, cognitive capacities, or goodness, but due to limited lexical and syntactic choices, or limited facility with these choices. As for the Organic view, to believe that meaning cannot be separated from form does not necessarily imply that there is only one right way to address any given subject but rather that variations in structure can greatly influence meaning. Regardless of the theoretical stance one takes, it seems that linguistic fluency, what can be done with the choices available, plays a critical role in shaping and presenting meaning.

In addition to illustrating how much overlap occurs between composition theories, Berlin's discussion indirectly illuminates the fact that all three of Milic's theories of style share the same epistemological

premise: some truth exists prior to language. Again, linguistic fluency determines, to a great extent, how successful writers are at imparting any such truths.

If style is comprised of the linguistic "choices" involved in shaping and presenting meaning, understanding the nature of those choices does appear to be central to both understanding and effectively teaching style. Four years after Milic's first article on theories of style, he published another article entitled "Rhetorical Choice and Stylistic Options: The Conscious and Unconscious Poles" (1971). The first article appears to receive more attention from researchers interested in style, which is unfortunate because this second article helps explain why the definition, theoretical placement and teaching of style have long been problematic.

Milic questions how much conscious control a writer has over style. Although the traditional view "implies a condition of total consciousness or control by the writer," it also "embodies . . . another view which contradicts it" in that style is perceived as the "signature" of originality (77). Milic explains that

his initial interpretation of Buffon's Discours sur le style, containing the famous aphorism "style is the man," was that true eloquence consists of the "proper ordering of thoughts" (78) with a Platonic view towards an ideal structure and content. In short, excellence in style is only achievable if the writer is a good person. The problem Milic finds with this earlier interpretation is that if style is seen as the attainment of an "achievable perfection" the question arises as to whether every example of composition has some ultimate and inevitable order of perfection to be discovered. Or, Milic asks, is style an order that the writer "imposes on the refractory materials of thought according to his own unique vision of the world?" (80). If the former is true, the writer merely finds the "key to the puzzle" of style; if the latter view (which Milic believes Buffon must have intended) is correct, individual creativity is "unescapable" (79):

> The ultimate extreme of the belief that a writer's personality determines the quiddity of his style is surely the case in which the writer can exert no control over the style at all, all of it being determined by habits, associations, and conditioning. At the other pole is the belief that the writer can consciously control and artistically shape

> every detail of his utterance. The evident underlying contradictions in Buffon's argument perhaps reflect the curious circumstance that some truth lies at both ends. Obviously, if he chooses to do so, the writer can weigh every word before he commits himself to it; and he can, moreover, alter at will any word that he has set down, so that he may be said . . . to have complete power of his language. Yet at the same time he cannot choose any word that is not part of his vocabulary or any form . . . not included in his own syntactical resources. He cannot . . . exceed his idiolect. Every writer . . . knows how mysteriously the words do flow on some occasions and refuse to on others. And yet the theory of style and the applications of theory . . . have proceeded as if the process of composition and therefore the stylistic performance were a fully conscious process. (80)

As evidence of the "unconscious nature" of composing, Milic points to the mental processes of searching out or "scanning," and "generating," the right words and forms for the "wordless thoughts or ideas in the mind," as well as the speed at which strings of words and phrases are produced (80-81).

His contention is that we operate from "language-generating mechanisms" which often formulate and apply linguistic arrangements with only occasional conscious assistance (81). Grammar, explains Milic, "seems to take care of itself"; whereas, "meanings, including

specifically lexical choices . . . seem to require most of the [writer's] available attention" (81).

As further support for the unconscious nature of composing, Milic cites the frustration many experience during revision:

> the degree to which the writer is dominated by the writing is suggested by the frequency with which he finds it necessary to discard, throw away, and start again, as if there were some satisfaction in the clean slate or as if the previously-generated language imposed intolerable constraints on his freedom, as in fact it does within sentences on the syntactic level and beyond this, at the rhetorical level. (82)

The distinction between unconscious decisions or ("habitual") "stylistic options," derived from the "language-generating mechanism," and conscious decisions or "rhetorical choices," made "while the mechanism is at rest, is extremely significant (85). During revision, writers apply "rhetorical choices" as they correct errors in diction, syntax, and overall organization (85). Unlike "stylistic options" which "take place below the sentence level," "rhetorical choices" can be made anywhere because "any aspect of the text may be consciously scrutinized at will" (86).

Milic argues that many have "erroneously treated

all decisions constituting style as conscious "rhetorical choices" when "most writers" know "very little" about what they are doing when they write and have "much less conscious control over the final product than is commonly supposed" (87).

Composition teaching efforts fail because the process is unclear and, Milic adds, "everything that succeeds has an uncanny resemblance to the prescriptions of Quintilian" who knew that the process of writing takes years of practice and reading, as well as exercises in imitation, all pointing towards the "unconscious process" involved in the "production of language and . . . the formation of individual style" (84).

Because "choices" and "options" both imply the existence of selection, and because selection is a concept normally associated with conscious deliberation, we need to be clear about Milic's use of the term "option." "Stylistic options," as Milic has proposed and as I will continue to use the term, refers to those linguistic choices that elude consciousness, such that they are conducted without awareness or implicitly.

If we agree with Milic that both explicit "rhetorical choices" and implicit "stylistic options" contribute to a writer's style, we need to redefine style to incorporate both polarities. In other words, style must incorporate both the deliberate and the automatic linguistic choices involved in making and presenting meaning. Such a definition requires an eclectic approach to stylistic theory, one that allows for the influence of individual factors.

Milic's discussion clearly identifies the challenge we face in our attempts to teach style. To answer the question which prompted this investigation -- is style teachable? -- we need to ask whether it is possible to go beyond teaching conscious "rhetorical choices" to teach "stylistic options," which may play a much more significant role in the actual composing act. While Milic believes that some "rhetorical choices" do eventually become "stylistic options," the conditions that facilitate this transfer are not well understood.

Once a writer incorporates a wealth of both explicit and implicit options, these choices may very well become the tools for experimenting with, developing

and sustaining (amplification) language-oriented ideas prior to or during the act of placing these ideas on paper, when a second and perhaps less chaotic level of thought occurs. Stated from another angle, if the conventional language we employ with one another differs from the language that exists in our minds, the "wordless thoughts and ideas" that Milic speaks of, transforming those wordless thoughts into a language that creates meaning for both the writer and the reader may require an ample store of both explicit and implicit choices.

If writer "commitment" to material plays a key role in the making of meaning even at the sentence and inter-sentence level, as Strong indicates, is it possible that choices can even contribute to "commitment"? Most of us would agree that writing is "an act of discovery" and that much learning does indeed occur through writing, as Janet Emig asserts in "Writing as a Mode of Learning" (1977). But are we offering students the tools that they need to "discover" not just meaning but also relevance? Isn't linguistic facility critical for sustaining inquiry so that a writer may

"learn" from the act of writing?

The criticism against the plain style seems to be, at least in part, a call for greater attention to amplification and its reward in the form of more developed and critical thought. With basic writers, teaching amplification may seem secondary to teaching clarity, but it seems to me that the two qualities are complementary since many ideas become clear only after they have been exhaustively explored through the act of writing.

In light of Milic's distinction, Fortune's argument becomes questionable. In asserting that the process approach and its attention to invention has left attention to style by the wayside, Fortune implies that style has nothing to do with invention. Given that the boundary between free-writing and first drafts is fuzzy and the fact that any draft may prompt further invention, it is probably a mistake to deny the relationship between invention and style. To do so is to completely disregard "stylistic options" in favor of "rhetorical choices." It is similar to arguing that writers never develop arguments during the process of

writing, but only before they write or during revision.

Clearly, we must continue to teach "rhetorical choices" because they are valuable tools for writers. But perhaps it's time we direct a fair share of our time and attention towards strengthening "stylistic options."

As teachers of composition, I believe we must fill the missing gap Kehl speaks of, by re-instating imitation to its rightful position between reading and practice, so that our students may work towards internalizing, as Milic and Corbett point out, linguistic options. If we accept the initial stage of composing as a complex process of critical inquiry, internal reflection, and linguistic struggle, as well as the writing stage which may determine the success or failure of the finished product, we must place a greater emphasis on this stage in the classroom. In turn, perhaps we need to downplay audience considerations until final revisions take place, so as not to interfere or further complicate an already complex cognitive activity.

If attempts are made to supply our students with more than just explicit "rhetorical choices," our

students will have the tools to not only manipulate but also to create meaning. We need to continually remind ourselves that semantic and syntactic limitations prohibit not just clear meaning for the writer's audience but also for the writer. For until a writer reaches the point in which syntactic and lexical facility allows for true harmony and logical linguistic representation of previously nonlinguistic thoughts, one can hardly expect satisfaction as a reader.

Teaching style merely as conscious "rhetorical choices," during revision or editing, is inadequate. If we are willing to acknowledge that implicit "stylistic options" facilitate the development of critical thought and contribute to a writer's style, we must strive to instill these options to assist writers during the act of composing, at that moment when pen touches paper and the mind leaves its initial imprint.

We know so little about the process whereby "rhetorical choices" become "stylistic options." Those who advocate imitation, as well as those who favor sentence-combining, firmly believe that through generous exercise that which is practiced deliberately will

eventually become habit, or automatic. But perhaps there is a more direct way to instill "stylistic options." One approach to imitation -- prose memorization -- may be one such possible means.

CHAPTER TWO: A RECONSIDERATION OF THE STYLISTIC VALUE OF PROSE MEMORIZATION

Introduction

In Rhetorica Ad Herennium, memory is referred to as "the guardian of all the parts of rhetoric" (295). Today, there's a movement underway by researchers in composition to reclaim this neglected but not forgotten classical canon of rhetoric. Since Ebbinghaus' first experiments over a century ago with his own memory for nonsense syllables (On Memory 1885), psychologists have been busy trying to better understand this wonderful thing we call memory. By turning to their work, we may find answers to some of the more problematic aspects of teaching writing -- such as the teaching of style.

A major reason why teaching style can be problematic is addressed by Louis Milic, in "Rhetorical Choice and Stylistic Options: The Conscious and Unconscious Poles" (1971). Milic argues that many have "erroneously treated all decisions constituting style as conscious rhetorical choices, when "most writers" know "very little" about what they are doing when they write

and have "much less conscious control over the final product than is commonly supposed" (87). Milic makes an important distinction between "rhetorical choices," those conscious syntactic and lexical decisions usually employed during revision, and ("habitual") "stylistic options," those decisions that occur without our awareness during the act of composing. This distinction presents an interesting challenge. While we must continue to teach "rhetorical choices," because they are important tools for writers, perhaps we also need to devote a fair share of our efforts towards strengthening writers' "stylistic options."

There are three reasons why strengthening writers' syntactic "stylistic options" seems important. First, applied syntactic fluency may partially determine how successful a writer is in clearly presenting his/her intended meaning. Secondly, syntactic choices allow for amplification. The ability to manipulate a written proposition, to view it from a variety of angles, may contribute to the development of ideas. Finally, as Scardamalia, Bereiter and Goelman explain, in "The Role of Production Factors in Writing Ability" (1982),

because writers face numerous competing demands for attention during the act of composing but can only cope with a limited number at a time, easing the attention directed towards just one of these demands, i.e. syntax, allows writers to redirect that attention to other high-level rhetorical concerns, such as adapting an argument to a particular audience.

The method of strengthening syntactic "stylistic options" advocated in this essay is prose memorization. Unlike the classical imitative practice of paraphrase, memorization has been excluded from current composition instruction. In addition to taking the stance that imitation stifles creativity and devotes undue attention to the mechanics of form over meaning, many view rote learning as simply too old-fashioned for the 20th century classroom.

In "Imitation: Theory and Practice" (1951), Donald Clark explains that educators have always fallen into one of two groups: "the theoretics and the emperics" (21). The Romans were the "theoretics" who believed "in the efficacy of teaching sound doctrine through rational precepts, illustrated by approved models for

imitations"; whereas, today, most educators are "emperics," who hold "an equally strong belief in free experiment and assiduous and unguided practice as leading inevitably to improved learning" (21). Clark questions our need to take such "extreme positions" when we are free to partake of both "the traditional experience of the past and the free experimentation of the present" (22).

A good example of an over-zealous attempt to disregard the past as we admirably move forward is addressed by Susan McLeod in "The New Orthodoxy: Rethinking the Process Approach" (1986). Her argument is that our haste in embracing a novel approach to writing, the process-approach, may have caused us to throw out the wisdom of the product tradition, as well as overlook the weaknesses of this new orientation. Like Hall, McLeod does not perceive tradition and progress as incompatable, since her thesis is basically a call for a greater balance between the two.

In the conclusion of her article, McLeod notes a "need to research the role of rote learning and imitation in learning how to write" since "Linguistics

has taught us that repetition and copying play a large role in the acquisition of spoken language" (19). Contrary to McLeod's statement, it is a behaviorist's approach to language acquisition, and not the linguist's approach, that values the role of imitation. What linguistics has taught us is that language acquisition is species-specific and guided more by internal mechanisms rather than external stimuli, such as models or corrective responses.

In "The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Classical Rhetoric" (1971), Edward P.J. Corbett cites Quintilian on the value of memorization:

> [The boys] will form an intimate acquaintance with the best writings, will carry their models with them and unconsciously reproduce the style of the speech which has been impressed upon their memory. They will have a plentiful and choice vocabulary and a command of artistic structure and a supply of figures which will not have to be hunted for, but will offer themselves spontaneously from the treasure-house . . . in which they are stored. (qtd. in Corbett 246, from Institutio Oratoria, II, vii, 3-4)

Noting "unconsciously" and "spontaneously" as key words in Quintilian's passage, Corbett states (247):

> anyone who has had the experience while writing of having a phrase or a structure come back to him unbidden from the deep well of the

> subconscious might be willing to concede that the restoration of the practice of memorizing might be a good thing.

It's worth noting that when this type of phenomenon occurs it is not necessarily the meaning of the phrase that seems right for the writing in progress, but rather the rhythm or the syntactic pattern. Clearly, much of this pattern-making occurs without our awareness, at the level of a "stylistic option." What Corbett describes is an interesting example of a "stylistic option" that has risen to the awareness level of a "rhetorical choice."

While prose memorization may seem old-fashioned, the best arguments in its favor since Quintilian arise out of 20th century psychology research into memory. I would like to review findings from three overlapping areas of memory research, findings that seem to provide adequate justification for a reconsideration of prose memorization:

1. Due to the organizational demands required for successful recall, prose memorization may be an alternative to traditional approaches towards grammar.
2. Under the right conditions, including voluntary rehearsal, memory for surface structure is possible.
3. Implicit memory/learning may be less

resistant to decay than explicit memory/learning.

In addition to examining these three areas of research, this essay attempts to provide a framework for a future empirical investigation into the question: will voluntary prose memorization increase a basic writer's "stylistic options"? In other words, can prose memorization lead to measurable syntactic development in written language production?

Memory for Prose: An Alternative to Grammar Instruction?

Perhaps traditional attempts to teach grammar have failed because we have been going about it in the wrong way -- the direct way, and treating grammar as if the rules we have devised from linguistic performance are meaningful to students once they are understood as rules.

An alternative view towards grammar and one of the best arguments against teaching it directly is presented by Rumelhart and McClelland in "On Learning the Past Tenses of English Verbs" (1986). These researchers call into question the traditional belief that language acquisition is a "process of inducing rules," a process

conducted by what has commonly been called the "language acquisition device" (217). Grammar rules have been viewed as "explicit" yet "inaccessible" and the language acquisition device is assumed to have "innate knowledge of the possible range of human languages and, therefore, is presumed to consider only hypothesis within the constraints imposed by a set of linguistic universals" (217). What Rumelhart and McClelland propose is "that lawful behavior and judgements may be produced by a mechanism in which there is no explicit representation of the rule" (217).

After designing a learning model of past tense verbs that exhibited the same stages of verb tense over-generalizations that children exhibit, they propose that we may be able to "characterize" our "judgements of grammaticality" in the form of rules, but that such rules "are not written in explicit form anywhere in the mechanism" (217). In other words, while formulating grammar rules from linguistic performance may help us talk about grammar, the rules themselves are not meaningful in or for production. Instead, learning occurs through repeated exposure and processing.

An alternative to teaching syntactic choices through the direct teaching of grammar is teaching syntactic choice indirectly through application. Memory studies have found that we memorize prose by chunking words together at clausal boundaries. This is important because it suggests that prose memorization demands may strengthen writers' syntactic knowledge.

In experiments by Ladefoged and Broadbent (1960) and Fodor and Bever (1965) subjects listened to sentences with superimposed auditory clicks. They were then asked to report on when the clicks occurred. Subjects often erroneously reported that the clicks occurred at major syntactic boundaries. Because phrase structures are processed as chunks to enhance sentence recall, it appears that the processing of the clicks had to await the processing of these chunks. Walter Kintsch notes, in Memory and Cognition (1982), that later studies reported clicks that weren't displaced, which "puzzled experimenters" until Seitz and Weber (1974) discovered that the nature of the test demands were responsible for the discrepancy (307). Apparently, the later studies did not ask subjects to remember and write

out the sentences, and then mark where the clicks occurred; instead, subjects were provided with prepared scripts and were only required to mark where each click was heard. Kintsch explains that giving subjects the written sentence "apparently eliminates for them the need to process it, and hence no phrase structure effects are obtained" (307).

This is a remarkable finding because it suggests that, in general, it is only when we have to remember a sentence that we fully process its syntactic features. Kintsch argues that "syntactic analysis is not a goal in itself in sentence comprehension, but is subordinate to the goal of determining the meaning of sentences" (328).

It's important to note that, as yet, we can only verify the psychological reality of phrase structures in language production. Whether we favor a Chomskian view that we are born or pre-programed with linguistic hardware that our native language taps into, a lexicalist view in which words rather than phrase structures are at the center of our linguistic operations, or Rumelhart and McClellan's view that the processes themselves determine linguistic operations,

the reality of constituent structure in production remains intact. Not only do we tend to pause between constituents, but when speech errors are made, as Maclay and Osgood report in "Hesitation Phenomena in Spontaneous Speech" (1959), we usually correct ourselves by repeating the entire constituent in which the error occurred.

The findings of the click experiments suggest that the attention given to syntactic patterns during prose memorization are probably much greater than the attention normally devoted to syntactic features during reading or listening. When we are only being asked to comprehend a sentence, we pay little attention to syntactic features except when extracting key words proves inadequate for comprehension, due to variations of standard word order or ambiguous semantic cues. But when recall demands exist, the limits of short-term memory require that phrase structures be organized.

In the well-known 1956 study "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Information Processing," George Miller reports that most individuals can only maintain five to nine units of

information in working memory. Miller argues that memory is limited not by the number of physical entities (letters, syllables, words) but rather by the number of meaningful chunks, whether they are nonsense syllables combined into meaningful units, words combined into meaningful phrases, or phrases combined into meaningful sentences. Whenever these units are combined, the amount of information that can be held active in short-term memory, or stored away into long-term memory in endless hierarchies for later access, increases dramatically. In "The Magic Number After Fifteen Years" (1975), Donald Broadbent argues that the number of units that can be held by working memory is probably closer to five.

One of the best known models for a linguistic chaining process is presented by Frazier and Fodor, in "The Sausage Machine: A New Two-Stage Parsing Model." As the title indicates, they compare parsing to a sausage machine, in which each word (sausage) is accessed, assigned a lexical and phrasal node and linked to adjacent words, to form groups averaging six words. These groups, or phrases, are then strung together into

phrase markers. They cite the limits of STM as evidence for this two-stage parser.

While they contend that the construction of phrase markers proceeds "bottom-up," they also argue that "within each stage of the parser, processing is not necessarily bottom up, nor is it necessarily top down" (317) but rather "information driven" (320). Phrase and sentence efficiency is attributed to what they term "minimal attachment," which, grossly over-simplified, is a parsing activity which results in utilizing the fewest number of words, attached to the fewest number of phrase units, thereby minimizing processing time and error probability (320).

When individuals memorize prose they do so by grouping syntactic units together, as David Rubin reports in "Very Long-Term Memory for Prose and Verse" (1977). Rubin's subjects were asked to recall prose passages "learned . . . in the course of growing up in America" (611). In a series of five experiments, subjects were tested for recall of "The Preamble to the Constitution," "Hamlet's Soliloquy," "The 23rd Psalm," the "Gettysburg Address" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

While many students could not recall the entire passages, the material that they did recall was accurate and organized into surface structure units, ending at breath pause locations.

All rote learning requires organization. Even "if input isn't organized," explains Kintsch, "a subject will impose some organization upon it to assist in recall or later retrieval" (250). With prose, recall is facilitated through the sorting and grouping of phrasal units. Presumably, these phrasal units can only be processed once they are identified as syntactic units. Therefore, prose memorization may be preferable over explicit grammar instruction as a means of strengthening syntactic repertoires.

Memory for Surface Structure

In Rubin's study of prose recall only one-third of the subjects reported intentionally memorizing the material, while two-thirds reported no intentional efforts. Rubin points out that the extreme accuracy and high success rate of his subjects' verbatim recall is in strict contradiction to traditional views regarding poor memory for surface structure.

Prior to the mid-70's, the majority of research studies on memory emphasized that semantic rather than surface information is always better recalled by subjects. Memory theorists, most notably Craik and Lockhart ("Levels of Processing: A Framework for Memory Research" 1972), devised levels-of-processing frameworks which posited that "depth" of processing facilitated both the durability of an encoding, and its successful recall. The semantic level was believed to reside at the deepest level, where the greatest number of encodings occurred.

But the 70's produced an influx of new research, prompting the design of recursive or parallel processing models over hierarchial levels and stressing that the processes themselves rather than the level or kind of processing determine recall. The concept of "depth" took on new meaning; rather than referring to a semantics locale on a theoretical model, depth was redefined as the degree of complexity involved in encoding an item, contributing to its later successful recall.

By 1979, Jacoby and Craik assert that material

which is difficult to encode will generally be easier to remember because "difficulty necessitates more extensive processing, which then results in the formation of a more distinctive trace" (12). In a sense, difficulty can be equated with novelty, for that which is unfamiliar may require new processes and encodings, whereas that which is familiar requires no or few alterations to pre-existing encodings.

This shift in thought, from a levels-of-processing to a transfer-appropriate-processing theoretical construct, was prompted by a variety of research findings, all drawing the same conclusion: surface structure is not necessarily resistant to recall. For example, Paul A. Kolers conducted an experiment using normal and spatially transformed texts. In "A Pattern Analyzing Basis of Recognition" (1979), Kolers reports that, during repeat exposure, graphemically transformed (inverted mirror-image) sentences were recognized more often and more quickly than normal sentences. He interprets his findings, as follows:

> the semantic is usually remembered better, not because it is semantic, but because its acquisition requires particular analysis; the graphemic is usually lost, not because it is

> graphemic, but because its acquisition requires little analysis, at least by the skilled reader. What is remembered better is what was analyzed more; the analytical operations themselves, their extent and complexity, account for performance. (384)

Kolers comments on the crucial role of the subjects involved in the experiment, in that their "prior practice at making elaborations about various types of information and practice at interpreting the previously stored material" contributes greatly to success (390).

This same attention to the individual is central to the thesis of Bransford, Franks, Morris and Stein in "Some General Constraints on Learning and Memory Research" (1979). Bransford et al. contend that the hypothesis that semantic processing leads to better memory than non-semantic processing may be based on the "relationships between to-be-learned inputs and the current state of the learner's knowledge and skills" (338). They argue that "the value or 'goodness' of particular acquisition activities can be defined only in relation to the nature of the testing context" (331).

Bransford et al. explain that "the mere quantity of elaboration is not sufficient to permit adequate remembering," because elaboration "can vary in its

effectiveness depending on the nature of the test situation (e.g., recall versus recognition)" and the present status of the learner's knowledge and skills (344-45). The authors point out that "a major reason for learning something" lies in its "transfer to new situations" (332). As an example, they cite language acquisition research by Bloom, Hood and Lightbrown ("Imitation in Language Development: If, When and Why?"), who found "that newly acquired linguistic constructions take place in the context of highly familiar content words (especially verbs)," providing "a basis for new development" (Bransford et al. 352).

In developmental psychology, this "basis for new development" is referred to as "headfitting." In the 1979 article "Theories of Memory and the Problems of Development: Activity, Growth and Knowledge," Ann Brown defines "headfitting" as "the compatibility between what is known and what can be known." (225). Brown points out that what is meaningful to an individual is highly dependent upon the experiences one has had with something, the "task and subject compatibility" (252).

In place of a levels-of-processing model, Bransford

et. al. advocate the transfer-appropriate-processing model, first proposed by Morris, Bransford and Franks in their 1977 article "Levels of Processing Versus Transfer Appropriate Processing." This new theoretical framework takes the concept of headfitting into consideration. Morris et al. describe the difference between the two frameworks, a difference that "involves . . . orientations towards the general problem of learning":

> In the current literature, the term "learning" is usually used synonymously with "learning a list of inputs," and the test is usually a test of memory for these inputs. However, even given the goal of remembering inputs, assumptions about the value of particular types of activities must be defined relative to the types of activities to be performed at the time of test. . . . The present orientation [transfer-appropriate-processing] assumes that learning involves learning from inputs as well as learning inputs. . . . [The] processes optimal for learning may . . . be different from those optimal for remembering the exact inputs presented during acquisition. . . . [N]onsemantic levels of processing need not result in inherently inferior traces representing what was learned. In short, transfer appropriate processing may sometimes involve the superficial levels of analysis that are deemed less adequate by the levels of processing approach. (531-2)

It seems that what an individual chooses to process is guided not only by external factors, i.e. instructions to comprehend a passage or instructions to memorize, but

also by internal instructions to process whatever best promotes learning. If learning is achieved by processing surface features, presumably syntactic learning will occur.

Research by Mark McDaniel suggests the distinctiveness of encodings produced by material that promotes internal processing instructions. In "Syntactic Complexity and Elaborative Processing" (1981), McDaniel reports that "increased syntactic complexity produces more elaboration, which in turn produces better memory" (487). He found that self-embedded sentences that were more difficult to process were better remembered than regular sentences, "but only for memory of syntactic information" and not semantics (487). He posits that if material "causes elaboration in surface domains, then that type of information will be remembered to some extent even if the task is to extract meaning" (494).

If we apply the concept of "headfitting" within the context of "transfer-appropriate learning" to syntactic learning, we would expect that only those syntactic patterns that are compatible with an individual's

current syntactic knowledge would be strengthened through prose memorization, in a fashion similar to what Bloom et. al. found. To identify compatible syntactic information, we may need to turn to the stages of syntactic development recognized by psycholinguists. Or, it may be possible that the rehearsal and recall demands of successful prose memorization would actually attend to "headfitting" limitations. Assuming that students were provided with a generous variety of syntactic patterns in any prose excerpts to be memorized, the memorization demands themselves may require that complete syntactic analysis be achieved. Since prose memorization requires generous rehearsal, early rehearsals could tackle initially compatible learning material, while later rehearsals could draw from this recently strengthened syntactic knowledge to foster the strengthening of yet more syntactic material.

Perhaps the value of prose memorization should not be addressed in terms of increased syntactic knowledge. In Research on Written Composition (1986), George Hillocks, Jr., explains that researchers have known for a long time that first graders can employ most of the

grammatical patterns that adults use (63). Ability and actual application, though, are two different things. The concern, then, is increasing a writer's facility, or frequency and ease, of alternative syntactic patterns, rather than imparting knowledge of these alternatives. According to Jean Berko Gleason, several studies indicate that demonstrated syntactic growth "continues until Grade 12 or beyond" (247 The Development of Language). Given college freshmen writing levels, we have to assume that such growth can indeed occur "beyond" 12th grade.

Recently, I supplied several college freshman writers, many of whom exhibit limited syntactic choices, with blank sentences containing only function words and punctuation, and were asked to create sentences that "worked" within the given patterns. The majority of the students did know and were able to apply many of these complex patterns, even though they appear to employ relatively few on their own. Because basic writers seem to possess a wealth of conscious syntactic patterns, yet apply relatively few as "stylistic options," these known but rarely employed patterns must exist in some kind of

weak or dormant state requiring practice in application, i.e. prose memorization.

Clearly, the task of remembering prose requires surface elaboration, due to its organizational demands. What memory for surface structure research informs us is that if any of the syntax within the prose passage to be remembered presents a distinct challenge during processing, the application and pattern is assumed to be encoded in memory.

Implicit Memory

This argument in favor of a reconsideration of prose memorization could be classified as an argument for the value of implicit learning, a growing field of interest in memory research. In the conclusion of his article on memory for syntactic complexity, McDaniel addresses implicit learning when he notes the "pragmatic value" of surface structure research "with regard to instruction" (494-5):

> A common strategy in an instructional setting is to design various tasks and exercises that facilitate assimilation of the to-be-learned material. Another strategy might be to present the materials in a form that itself would facilitate acquisition. . . . Materials could be presented in a form that would induce

> elaborate processing, and hence better memory, for information in a desired domain.

In other words, indirectly teaching some things through application, and hence processing, may be a preferable method of instruction. Rather than trying to explain how grammar works and what syntactic options are available to writers, perhaps prose memorization can assist student writers by indirectly strengthening this information.

Interest in the concept of implicit memory is growing, as Daniel Schacter explains in the review article, "Implicit Memory: History and Current Status":

> Psychological studies of memory have traditionally relied on tests such as free recall, cued recall, and recognition. A prominent feature of these tests is that they make explicit reference to, and require conscious recollection of, a specific learning episode. During the past several years, however, increasing attention has been paid to experimental situations in which information that was encoded during a particular episode is subsequently expressed without conscious or deliberate recollection. Instead of being asked to try to remember recently presented information, subjects are simply required to perform a task . . . [in which] memory is revealed by a facilitation or change in task performance that is attributable to information acquired during a previous study episode. (501)

Research findings by Michael Masson, reported in "Memory for the Surface Structure of Sentences: Remembering With and Without Awareness" (1984), suggest that what is acquired implicitly may actually be better recalled than that which makes explicit demands upon a subject. Masson conducted a series of three experiments in an attempt to "test claims about the nature of surface memory and its influence on recognition decisions and reprocessing fluency" (580). In addition, he sought "evidence for the possible existence of perceptual [nonsemantic] memory for words in a sentence" (580). He explains his initial hypothesis:

> If surface memory and perceptual memory are based on the same aspect of episodic memory, then they should share two striking characteristics that have already been associated with perceptual memory: (a) it is not influenced by the amount of semantic processing at initial encoding, and (b) it is very stable over time. . . . (581)

Through several carefully designed reading experiments, Masson was able to conclude that his subjects had formed "perceptual memories of the visual patterns of words contained in the sentences" (590). Perhaps more importantly, he found that these memories

"for specific patterns may be activated by new, visually similar patterns, thereby streamlining the identification of novel or less familiar words and promoting the development of fluent reading skill" (590-1). Since his experiments were carefully designed so as not to involve explicit decisions by subjects as to whether a target sentence's original surface form was repeated, Masson points out that his findings provide "powerful evidence for the existence of an enduring memory for surface structure" that is "not influenced by the amount of semantic processing . . . during original encoding" (589).

In his conclusion, Masson distinguishes between "two qualitatively different forms" of surface memory: 1) "conscious decisions" which are not enduring, except for those that require "special processing" due to syntactic complexity (as McDaniel found), "pragmatic inferencing" due to "specific wording," or explicit instructions to remember form, and 2) a "very enduring" form of memory "based on the existence of perceptual memory for the words contained in the sentences" (589-91).

Discussion

Research into memory for prose, memory for surface structure, and memory without awareness seems to provide adequate justification for reconsidering the stylistic benefits of prose memorization in the composition classroom.

Early in this investigation there was one nagging question that kept returning: why should prose memorization prove any more beneficial to the syntactic development of a writer than years of reading and listening to the language of others? Clearly, it shouldn't. But those of us who work with adult basic writers for only one short semester know that a semester's worth of reading cannot make up for years of neglect.

What we need is an alternative pedagogical approach towards style, one that forces students to attend to surface structure. When reading or even listening to the speech of others, we generally remember semantic rather than surface features because we are most likely to be called upon to recall the "gist" of the material. But if we are asked to memorize material

verbatim, recall demands require surface attention. While sentence-combining activities hold promise, prose memorization may prove equally if not more beneficial because of its potential to facilitate or strengthen implicit, rather than explicit, syntactic facility. In other words, prose memorization may be a means of going one step beyond teaching "rhetorical choices"; it may be a means of indirectly instilling "stylistic options." Instead of presenting grammar directly, and treating it as if the rules we have devised from linguistic performance are meaningful once they are understood as rules, prose memorization provides an opportunity for writers to make grammar meaningful through application.

The very process of successfully memorizing prose requires that surface features be analyzed, processed as units, and stored in memory. If any of the syntactic patterns within a prose passage to be memorized presents a challenge during analysis, the process and pattern is apt to be encoded in memory. This processing may or may not require explicit effort, but if difficulties are encountered in processing, the processing activity itself will probably be remembered, including memory for

surface features. While Masson's study (suggesting that implicitly acquired material may be less resistant to decay than explicitly acquired material) only addresses recognition in the context of reading fluency and does not address successful reproduction of learned patterns, the primary importance of his finding to this discussion is that it provides further re-inforcement for the view that surface features, specifically visual, can be encoded through implicit versus explicit memory.

Of course, subjects involved in prose memorization are aware that they are stringing words together during rehearsal; but they are usually not aware, for example, that they have just attached an infinitive to a noun phrase, followed by a verb phrase, imbedded with an adverbial clause, strung onto a periodic sentence, etc. As children, we do not deliberately acquire grammar; instead, we implicitly acquire syntactic patterns. Native linguistic performance (what we actually say), like linguistic competence (our judgements concerning grammaticallity), is generally more spontaneous or automatic than deliberate or conscious.

Assuming that syntactic maturity is enhanced

through prose memorization, one very important question remains: what conditions, if any, might facilitate the spontaneous reproduction of a specific syntactic pattern acquired in prose memorization during a subsequent writing occasion? One possibility is that when a writer employs a previously familiar syntactic pattern that also existed in a memorized prose passage, an adjacent pattern strengthened during prose memorization would emerge as a new option for the writer's next sentence. If memory for visual and acoustic features are "natural by-products" of perceptual analysis, as Kintsch posits (237), it is possible that a writer involved in the act of composing will tap into a rhythm that is familiar only because it was experienced and processed during the memorization of the prose, similar to the phenomenon described earlier by Corbett. Or, as Masson's findings suggest, the visual encodings of a single word may possibly prompt recall of a previously encountered syntactic context. If mental scanning of the lexicon occurs, perhaps a variety of words under consideration may, in turn, prompt consideration of a variety of patterns in which the words have been previously

processed during memorization. Not all psycholinguists, however, support the concept of such language frames.

Assuming that memorized syntactic patterns can be applied or reprocessed in new contexts, each additional pattern or "stylistic option" provides one more valuable resource for the writer.

But to go beyond assumptions, we need further research into the stylistic benefits of prose memorization. Specifically, we need long-term studies designed to accurately measure pre- and post-memorization applications of syntactic patterns within student writing samples. Only then can we fully determine the usefulness of rote learning as it may benefit the teaching of style. Merely analyzing two essays by a student, one written before memorizing prose and one written after, is inadequate, since in any given composition a student may not need to employ a pattern he/she has previously applied. And, as explained earlier, explicitly testing students for their knowledge of specific patterns before and after prose memorization is also an inadequate means of measuring applied syntactic fluency. To fully realize any increase in

syntactic facility, numerous before and after writing samples would need to be analyzed to determine what patterns dominate an individual's syntactic style, to determine what new patterns emerge, if any, following generous exercise in prose memorization, and to determine whether these patterns actually correspond to patterns present in the memorized prose. In regard to the concept of "headfitting," we may want to identify what syntactic processing is compatible with an individual's current syntactic knowledge, although this may not be necessary. Finally, since the material selected for memorization, as well as the task itself, may not appeal to all students, accounting for degrees of motivation would be desirable, although perhaps impractical.

We have yet to empirically validate whether prose memorization will contribute to syntactic fluency. The possibility clearly exists, but more research is needed. For now, we have to trust the judgement of Quintilian and his followers, who valued imitation, as Corbett explains, not because it was a means of being like another person, but because it was a means of being

different; the "internalization of structure" may very well be what "sets us free" as writers (250).

Because syntactic facility probably contributes to the development of ideas, the linguistic features of style appear to overlap invention. When the author of Rhetorica Ad Herrenium states that memory is "the treasurehouse of all the ideas supplied by invention," we can assume that memory both stores and lends items for invention. A better understanding of memory promises to benefit much more than a re-examination of the value of a classical approach towards the teaching of style in the composition classroom. As we learn more about memory, it seems plausible that memory will eventually be reclaimed as the mother canon, or "the guardian of all the parts of rhetoric," since memory seems to both draw from and contribute to a writer's understanding and application of each of the other four canons of rhetoric.

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